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WANTED—AN ADDITIONAL COLLEGE REQUIREMENT IN ENGLISH

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“Aye, men may wonder as they scan
A living, thinking, breathing man
Confirmed”—another test to plead.

And this “man” is no inexperienced girl but a woman who has wrestled with the college requirements in English for fifteen years and more. In by-gone days she has led fainting troops across the unpronounceable deserts of Siberia in the rear of a fleeing Tartar tribe. She has listened to the thrilling periods of Webster’s Bunker Hill oration as rendered by a girl who couldn’t read three consecutive words correctly, even when her mind was on them, and whose mind was more than nine-tenths occupied in wondering whether or not the boy across the aisle would ask her to dance with him that evening at the “Sophomore reception.” Then, on the other hand, this teacher remembers some rare and wonderful moments in her classes when, for instance, a girl has read “Home they brought her warrior slain,” with such feeling and expression that schoolroom surroundings were forgotten and class and teacher alike felt the hush of the chamber of death and the relief that came when the mother’s tears flowed over the dead man’s child; or when some boy with a deep voice and a manly intelligence has read the peroration of Burke’s speech on Conciliation grandly, bringing out all the nobility of thought and language, till we saw the vision as it came to the mind of the great statesman, of a mighty and generous people abandoning petty questions of interest and of policy and elevating their minds to the greatness of that trust to which the order of Providence called them. Such reading is worth forty pages of notes and a hundred examination questions.

Have you guessed the additional requirement for which I plead? It is a test in reading aloud. We teachers can get up

little enthusiasm over the subject as matters stand now, and, sorely against our consciences, are often obliged to neglect this important branch of education. But if there were a test to be passed, or if certificate rank of 80 must be attained in reading as in other subjects, there would be a renewal of interest in the oral interpretation of the masterpieces we are called upon to teach, which would be of incalculable value to our students, whatever calling in life they follow.

Then, too, we might thus gain time and opportunity to train the "American voice" whose strident tones are so severely criticized by foreigners. A few years ago in Paris, in a crowded room of the Musée de Cluny, I heard the piercing tones of a feminine voice saying "Where's the old Roman swinging bath? I can't find it anywhere." All turned to look at the speaker, a very pretty young American girl, who tore across the room, well pleased to be the object of attention, and quite unconscious that her compatriots were ashamed both of her ignorance and her bad manners. She had misread swinging for swimming, it appeared.

This girl, or her prototype, appears at every corner in Europe. On behalf of her teachers I plead for a better chance to train her in reading and speaking—even at the expense of sparing her a few half-digested facts.

This brings me to the practical question which stands like a lion in the path. Where shall we get the time? But you remember that when Christian reached the lions he found that they were securely chained. Whether from lack of faith on our part or some other cause our lions are not often thus fastened but ramp about, ready to devour the neglectful, so I would cannily lasso them beforehand. I would remove from the present requirements in English, to a very large extent, the study of the lives of the authors. In most cases these are none of our business, anyhow. To be sure our students must know something of the authors' place in and influence upon literature, but I am convinced that we could cut out with great advantage much of the study of their private lives. If we could put the question to the authors themselves, who can doubt what their answer would be?

Even the pure and great-souled Milton might well quail before the vision of a generation of school girls criticizing his treatment of his daughters; while as for the rest, is there one among them who would not gladly choose oblivion in regard to some points, at least, of his career?

Have you never heard Macbeth's speeches so murdered that Duncan was half avenged? Have you not heard the "Passing of Arthur" given with such halting and stumbling that your soul cried out within you for time to teach that boy to read, or authority to condition him because he couldn't read? I believe we are failing in our duty to the rank and file of our pupils in not demanding of them the ability to read aloud intelligently what they have studied, as well as to *write* the answers to questions upon it.

There is a tradition that when Daniel Webster presented himself for admission to Phillips Exeter Academy a New Testament was given him with the request that he read aloud a passage. He read it in his grandest manner with "God-gifted organ voice" and was at once admitted to the school without further examination. I am not quite so radical as to advocate admitting a student to college—not even an embryo Daniel Webster—in Algebra and Plane Geometry, because he can read his mother tongue with correctness and intelligence, but I do believe that the ability to read thus would be more useful to our girls and boys, and a more reasonable thing to demand of their immature youth, than to expect them to write an account of the psychological development of the character of Godfrey Cass, or the history of Sir Walter Scott's financial difficulties.